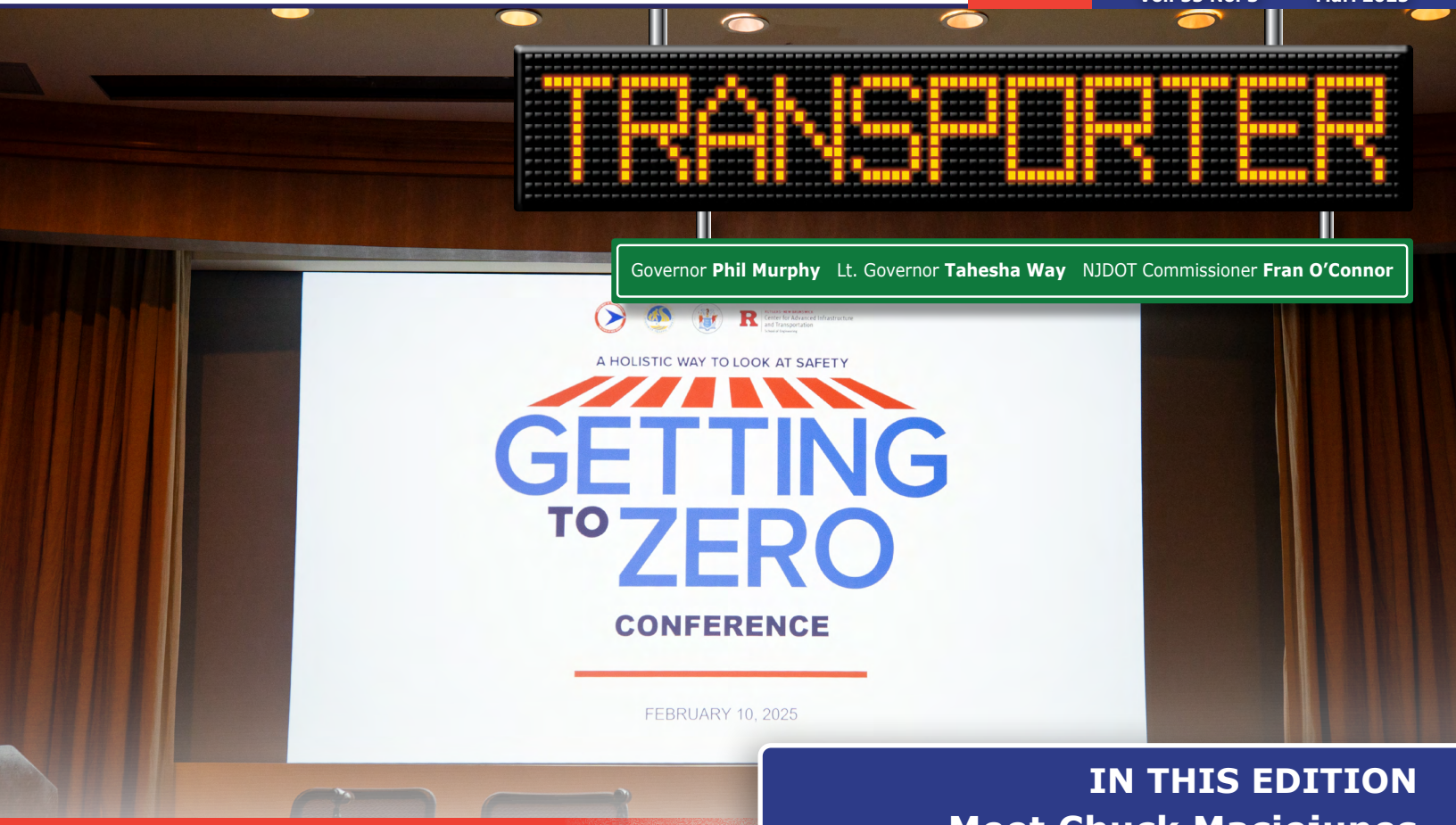
Vol. 55 No. 3 Mar. 2025


TRANSPORTER
Governor Phil Murphy Lt. Governor Tahesha Way NJDOT Commissioner Fran O'Connor
A HOLISTIC WAY TO LOOK AT SAFETY
GETTING TO ZERO
CONFERENCE
FEBRUARY 10, 2025

Getting to Zero Means Rethinking Everything

By Leanna Nelson

It can easily be argued that no other state agency impacts the lives of New Jersey residents and visitors more than NJDOT. Our work is seen and used every day, by every single person, whether they realize it or not. Now, a bold new challenge has been set, and our collective efforts will be life changing.

Earlier this year, Governor Phil Murphy signed legislation creating the Target Zero Commission with the goal of eliminating traffic deaths and serious injuries in New Jersey by 2040. Chaired by Commissioner Fran O'Connor, this group is tasked with developing the Target Zero Action Plan – a roadmap to achieving zero roadway fatalities – and delivering it to the state legislature within one year.

With no time to waste, leaders, policy makers, and advocates gathered at the Getting to Zero Conference on February 10 in New Brunswick.

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Setting the Stage for Change

At this half-day event, Governor Murphy and Commissioner O'Connor spoke about the urgency of reaching zero traffic deaths and the steps needed to get there. Panelists from NJDOT and partner agencies led discussions on the Safe System Approach (SSA), private and public sector collaboration, and advocacy involvement.

Continued on page 2

Commissioner O'Connor kicked off the event with a powerful call to action. "Too many lives have been lost, too many families forever changed by preventable tragedies," he said. "This is about more than just policies or programs – it's about people. And it's our responsibility to make sure that no one has to fear for their life just trying to get where they're going."

The morning's first session, New Jersey's Safety Landscape: The Road to Zero, featured a presentation by NJDOT's Frank Neary, Director of the Division of Safety Programs and Transportation Data. Neary highlighted current crash statistics while offering a stark reminder that, "every single number … represents an empty chair at a holiday dinner table, missed life experiences with loved ones, and even missed seemingly routine daily experiences that some take for granted."

He went on to explain how getting to zero will require a different approach to roadway safety. "While we have been working hard for the last 60 years or so to save lives, to get to the next level we will have to shift our thinking."

Bringing the Safe System Approach to Life

The panel, How We Get to Zero: Adoption of SSA by Public Agencies, brought together experts to discuss how public agencies are integrating the SSA, as well as share insights and current initiatives.

NJDOT's Daniel LiSanti, Deputy Director of the Division of Safety Programs and Transportation Data, provided an overview of the SSA and stressed the importance of fostering alignment as Target Zero moves forward. "Safety must come first. It's not just a goal – it's a fundamental commitment we must live by every day," he said. "To make this vision a reality, we need to fully embrace and believe in the SSA safety principles and elements as our lifesaving philosophies."

NJDOT's Jeevanjot Singh, Section Chief of Engineering, along with Michael Rizol, Director of the New Jersey Department of Highway Traffic Safety, offered a more in-depth look at the SSA's five safety elements: Safer People, Safer Vehicles, Safer Speeds, Safer Roads, and Post-Crash Care.

Governor Murphy's Commitment to Safety

Midway through the conference, Governor Murphy took the stage to reaffirm his administration's commitment to eliminating roadway fatalities.

"We're not here to talk about what could be done. We're here to commit to what must be done," he said. "That's why we created the Target Zero Commission – to bring together experts, lawmakers, and transportation leaders to develop a real plan, with real accountability, to make sure we reach zero deaths by 2040."

Murphy also highlighted recent pedestrian safety improvements deployed by NJDOT, including the successful redesign of the Route 129 and Lalor Street intersection in Trenton and new enhancements at the Route 1&9 and East Jersey Street intersection in Elizabeth. He emphasized that these aren't just one-off projects – they're part of a broader strategy to create safer roads across the entire state.

Advocate and Private Sector Collaboration

How We Get to Zero: Collaboration is the Key (Advocacy Groups) brought a different perspective to the table. Speakers from the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, the Nikhil Badlani Foundation, and the NJ Bike & Walk Coalition discussed how community-led initiatives and advocacy efforts are driving real change. This session reminded everyone in the room that public input isn't just valuable – it's essential.

How We Get to Zero: Collaboration is the Key (Private Sector) featured experts from AAA, the Brain Injury Alliance of NJ, and EZ Ride to discuss how new technologies and private-sector partnerships can help advance safety goals.

Turning Talk into Action

Finally, NJDOT's Eric Powers, Assistant Commissioner of Statewide Planning, Safety, and Capital Investment, closed the conference by putting the scale of the task ahead into perspective. In New Jersey, getting to zero will mean getting through 365 days with not one fatal incident or serious injury, with over 78 billion vehicle miles traveled each year on our more than 39,000 miles of public roadways. "As hard as that may be, the lives of our friends, family, and fellow citizens are worth it," he said.

At the end of the day, achieving zero roadway deaths isn't just the job of a few people at NJDOT – it's something we all have a hand in. This isn't just a goal. It's a commitment. Together, we will make it happen – because one death is too many.

Meet the Executive Leadership Team

Profile #5

Chuck Maciejunes NJDOT

Chief Financial Officer

Years of Service:
37 Years in May

First Position at NJDOT:
Right of Way Negotiator

Chuck says it's... PORK ROLL

What is your goal or primary focus as Assistant Commissioner?
As the Chief Financial Officer, my primary focus is to ensure that NJDOT serves as an effective "financial steward" of the funds entrusted to the Department. I aim to find ways to continually enhance customer service and interaction with both our internal and external customers and to promote an environment that values innovation and the implementation of new technology.

What managerial trait do you try to uphold in your day-to-day?
Borrowing from Steve Jobs. Management is about persuading people to do things they do not want to do, while leadership is about inspiring people to do things they never thought they could.

What's your go-to karaoke song?
"Don't Stop Me Now" by Queen

Do you have a favorite book or movie that has influenced you?

Mindset by Carol Dweck

What's a hobby or interest you have that might surprise people?

I am an avid weightlifter and competed in bodybuilding in my 20's, 30's, and 40's.

Over the next few months, you will have an opportunity to get to know our Senior Staff in this continuing feature of the *Transporter*

Celebrate Saint Patrick's Day with Commissioner O'Connor

By Lizzy Galamba

As March Madness is to college basketball fans, March is a month-long celebration of Irish history, heritage and culture to the true Irishman, and NJDOT Commissioner Fran O'Connor is no stranger to (safe and responsible) St. Patrick's Day celebrations.

"I had three grandparents that were born in Ireland, so my parents always celebrated St. Patrick's Day," Commissioner O'Connor said. "They always took us up to the Jersey City Parade, and we used to get dressed up. Myself and my five siblings, especially the four boys, always wore shamrock bow ties and hats, and I remember my father making green Jello and decorating the house."

Decorating for St. Patrick's Day, a tradition that has continued since his childhood, is Commissioner O'Connor's first step in celebrating the holiday. Then, his month-long parade schedule begins.

"I love parades. I love people marching. I love seeing people. I love people gathering," Commissioner O'Connor said.

What began as a fun childhood tradition has turned into an outlet for Commissioner O'Connor to connect with his colleagues at NJ Transit (NJT) and the South Jersey Transportation Authority (SJTA), and more importantly, it has become a resource for Commissioner O'Connor to meet the people he cares about most: our customers.

Commissioner O'Connor (far right) with his three brothers.

This year's parade schedule has filled Commissioner O'Connor's weekends. It began on March 2 with Belmar's Lake Como St. Patrick's Day Parade. Commissioner O'Connor arrived at seven o'clock that morning to meet NJT colleagues, greet passengers and visit the police control center.

"I love that people use the transit system to get into Belmar and use it to get home safely. My colleagues from Transit are there greeting folks and directing them where to go," Commissioner O'Connor said. "So, I make that one of my things that I have to do every year, and I'll do it this year. I'll be there at seven o'clock, and not too many people get off the train then, so that's when you have time to talk."

St. Patrick's Day weekend brings Commissioner O'Connor back to his hometown for the Jersey City parade. Then, the big day arrives.

"On the morning of St. Patrick's Day, before we go to Saint Stephen's Green Pub, my wife will make a full Irish breakfast. We have an Irish store in Spring Lake where we get the black and white sausage and the bangers," Commissioner O'Connor said, commenting on the difficulties of finding traditional Irish foods in mainstream grocery stories. "My wife also makes a killer Irish Soda Bread. It's unbelievable. I can't tell you her secret, but she has a secret on how she makes it as good as it is."

Then, they're off to the pub for a morning of traditional Irish music and lunch, before returning home to their own Irish pub to celebrate the night.

"My boys and I have friends over, and we celebrate St. Patrick's Night," Commissioner O'Connor said. "Naturally, I don't drive, and my wife doesn't drink. So, I'm allowed to drink on St. Patrick's Day, and I do anything Guinness. When I say 'Guinness,' people often think of the Guinness drink, but there's also Smithwick's and Harp's. That's a Guinness beer. So, one of those three beers I would partake in, in moderation."

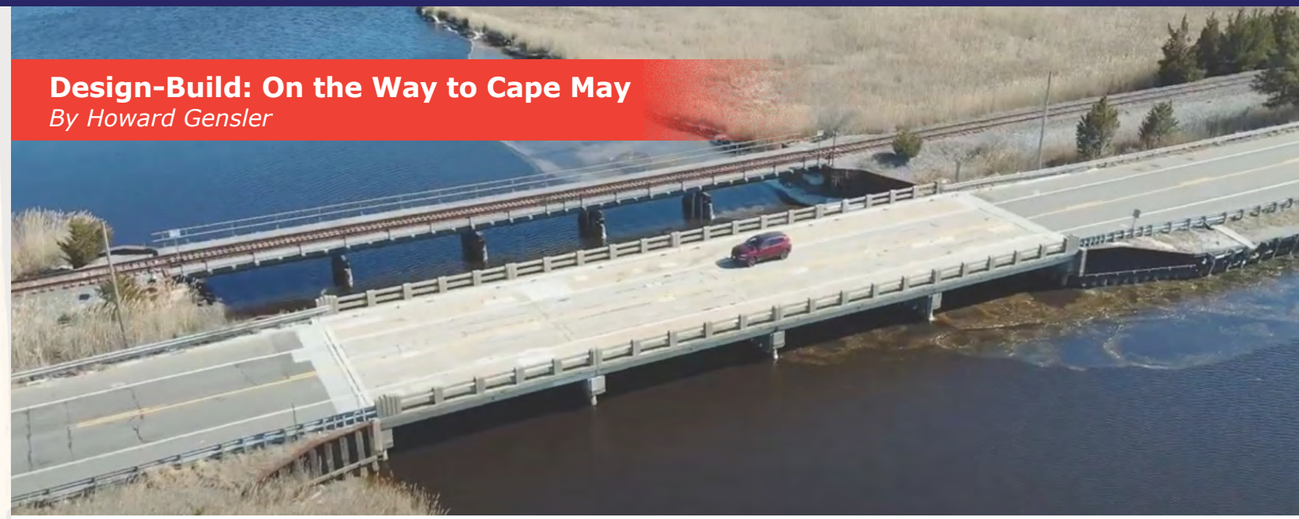
Commissioner O'Connor urges anyone celebrating St. Patrick's Day with a Guinness, some Irish whiskey, or any alcoholic beverage to plan ahead. Utilize a ride share app, designate a driver or volunteer to be one yourself. St. Patrick's Day should end in celebration, not in tragedy.

"All I can say, for everyone: Be a hero. Be a designated driver. One drink is too many to get behind the wheel of a car," Commissioner O'Connor said. "I say be a hero in remembrance of John Elliott. We all have to be heroes and be designated drivers when we can. If not, we have ride share apps or you can call a friend to pick you up, but never drink and drive, never, even during the High Holy Days of St. Patrick."

Commissioner O'Connor will finish the month with the Highlands St. Patrick's Day parade on Saturday, March 22 and the Bayonne parade, where his friend will serve as Grand Marshall, on Sunday, March 23.

For more information on Ensign John R. Elliott and the HERO Campaign founded in his honor, please see "Turning Tragedy to Triumph" on the first page of the December 2024 Transporter.

John R. Elliott HERO Campaign for Designated Drivers®



Design-Build: On the Way to Cape May

By Howard Gensler

A small Route 50 bridge over Cedar Swamp Creek, may be a bridge to the future of road repair in New Jersey. The two-lane stretch on the way to Cape May is the first project undertaken by NJDOT's new design-build delivery method, a better, faster way to get construction projects through the arduous bidding/construction process.

Overseeing design-build is NJDOT veteran Thomas J. Kondash, Jr., Director, Alternative Project Delivery. The *Transporter* spoke with Kondash in February, on the windy Route 50 bridge, as trucks sped by rattling the railings.

Kondash said that design-build differs from the previous way of doing things because now a single entity will oversee both the design and the building. In the former method, the design would be done first, and then it would be put out to bid to see who would get the construction contract. While design-build expects to save money, more attention is paid to the quality of the overall proposal, as opposed to just looking for the lowest bid.

Legislation allowing design-build in New Jersey was passed in 2021 and rules were codified last year. "The advantage," Kondash said, "is that we're able to move the construction schedule up and award the bid sooner. By combining and overlapping final design and construction, it saves upwards of a year to two years of time. And it allows for innovation by the design-builder to look at the project differently than how we would if we went through a full final design."

Designers and builders are coming up to speed on the new process. "Unless they've done construction in New York," Kondash said, "those making proposals are less familiar with the design-build methodology. The design consultants have more experience than the contractors, so there is going to be a learning curve, when those two teams form to become a single entity design-build proposal."

Although the Cedar Swamp Creek bridge is still safe to drive over, Kondash said it is being replaced because "it was built 60 years ago, is considered functionally obsolete and structurally deficient."

NJDOT expects to choose a design-builder before the end of the year and once construction begins on the Route 50 project, work is anticipated to take between two and two and a half years to complete.

TRANSPORTER

Communications Director: Jim Barry

Graphic Designer: Nick Whartenby

Editor-in-Chief: Steve Schapiro

Editor: Lizzy Galamba

Contributors: Nick DeJohn, Sarah Ekenezar, Howard Gensler, Greg Anthony Jones, Mariah Kondash, Jonathan Lahoda, Leanna Nelson

For news and story ideas, contact us at: elizabeth.galamba@dot.nj.gov

Kindness Korner - Administrative Professionals Day

By Nick DeJohn

It's 8:59 a.m. as Penny hastily walks into her office, ready for a hectic day filled with meetings, interviews, and unexpected tasks. She takes comfort in seeing Sheldon, her proficient administrative assistant, already at his desk, meticulously organizing her schedule for the challenges ahead.

"Morning, Sheldon."

"Penny, did you know that prior to the early 18th century, the typical morning salutation was not 'Good Morning,' but rather 'Good Morrow'? Fascinating, isn't it?"

"Sheldon, honey, please—" Penny begs. "Today is going to be a TOTAL mess."

"Oh, please! I've encountered scenarios far more catastrophic than this," Sheldon reassures her as he pulls up her calendar on his computer. "First on your agenda is the budget presentation at precisely 9:30. To arrive punctually, you'll need to depart by 9:20, factoring in the time for a quick restroom stop in the less crowded and much cleaner third-floor bathroom and the likelihood of an inevitable and perplexing chat with Howard, our endearingly baffling security guard."

"Smart. I was stuck in a 20-minute debate with him last week about fountain pens."

"As you naturally should have been. It's a very interesting topic."

Penny rolls her eyes as Sheldon dives back into her game plan.

"And then you're meeting with Raj and the I-80 project management team at 11, followed by consecutive interviews for the new recruitment position in HR at 1."

"Ugh, it just never ends." Penny says, as she rubs her eyes.

"Actually, the interviews were originally at 12, but I was able to reschedule them to a later time, thereby allocating a full hour for you to have lunch."

"Or to have a nap," she corrects him.

Sheldon glances at her as his phone buzzes. "And just a heads up, your 3:00 appointment with the Comms team—that's short for Communications—has encountered a minor delay, and they've pushed it back 30 minutes."

"Oh, good, time for more napping."

Another look.

"Uh, I mean… time for more prepping?"

Sheldon gives an approving nod.

"Oh, and speaking of getting sidetracked, I bumped into Leonard downstairs, and he mentioned he wants to chat about the Backyard Games sometime today."

"I've already spoken with him and secured a time slot for the two of you at 4:30. And given the last-minute nature of this arrangement, I've also ensured that a reminder has been dispatched to your phone."

Penny lets out one last sigh, deeply grateful for Sheldon's invaluable skills. His organizational prowess, communication efficiency, and problem-solving abilities enable her to focus on the big picture without overlooking the little details, making her demanding day feel both manageable and achievable.

"Well, thank you, Sheldon. As always, you are on top of it all."

"Of course."

She begins to turn away before Sheldon calls back to her.

"Oh, Penny! One more thing."

"Yes?" What else could there possibly be?

Sheldon hands her a hot cup of coffee. Penny smiles.

"You really know how to make me look good, Sheldon."

"Well, someone has to."

Penny playfully makes a face at him, as she enters her office, prepared to begin her day.

In honor of **Administrative Professionals' Day**, we celebrate the vital contributions of the dedicated individuals who ensure the seamless operation of offices everywhere. From secretaries and administrative assistants to receptionists and support staff, these professionals are the backbone of organizational efficiency.

At NJDOT, their expertise in organization, communication, and strategy is crucial to the Department's success in planning, building, and maintaining a strong transportation infrastructure. Remember to express your gratitude for them on Wednesday, April 23!

News & Notes

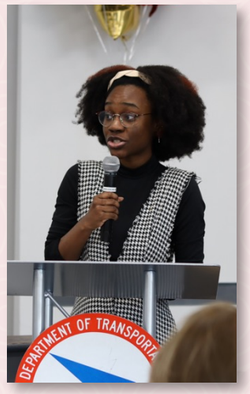
News & Notes is a collection of employee awards, retirements, service anniversaries and other shareable and NJDOT pride-producing news.

Black History Month Celebration: Addressing the Inequalities of Urban Planning

By Lizzy Galamba

The Black History Committee hosted the 37th Annual Black History Month Celebration, on February 27 – the first, in-person celebration since 2020. This year's theme, Black Urbanism: Shaping Public Policy in Transportation, focused on the ways in which transportation, particularly that which was built through urban centers, were physical barriers used to segregate Black and Brown communities and, through recognition of these historic inequalities, how we can build a more just transportation network that provides better accessibility to the very communities it once isolated.

"At the New Jersey DOT, we know that transportation is about more than just roads and bridges – it's about people. It's about access, opportunity, and the ability to move safely and freely. And throughout history, Black Americans have played an essential role in ensuring that progress is not just measured in miles, but in meaningful change," Commissioner O'Connor said, during the celebration.



This message of hope was beautifully conveyed in an original poem, "Urban Planning Justice," (see page 11), written and performed by Sarah Ekenezar, Division of Civil Rights and Affirmative Action (DCR/AA) serving as a thoughtful transition into the second half of the celebration, which addressed where we can go from here.

In their presentation "Title VI and Urban Planning: The Connection," Randyn Love and Gabrielle Zalot, DCR/AA staff, looked to historic examples of racially unjust urban planning policies and how those policies affected Black and other minority residents in New Jersey, particularly those living in Newark and the Oranges. Their presentation demonstrated only by looking to the past and recognizing injustice can we accept the need for and enact changes that correct these barriers.

Charles T. Brown, keynote speaker and Founder/CEO of Equitable Cities, a minority- and veteran-owned firm that focuses on urban planning, public policy and research on the intersection of transportation, health and equity to revitalize the communities most effected by transportation and environmental injustices; is one leader working to turn these inequities on their head to better serve the communities they once impacted. His work to enact Complete Street policies in Jersey City and Hoboken have made pedestrian and bike access safer. By achieving the goal of Zero Deaths on local roadways, these communities are world models of how equity increases road usership while prioritizing and accomplishing safer streets.

This couldn't be possible without urban planning and design, public outreach and engagement, training and workshop development, technical assistance, quantitative and qualitative research (through focus groups, surveys, equity analysis, etc.), and program evaluation – all of which Brown encourages NJDOT continue implementing into state projects, prioritizing the communities who need it most.

The program ended with a Black History trivia game, as well as delicious cakes, cookies, pudding and other sweet treats from a local, Black-owned business A Taste of Soul Pastries.

Many thanks are due to the Black History Committee, DCR/AA, performers, presenters and organizers, namely Vicki Tilghman-Ansley, Director, DCR/AA; Rachel Outram, Manager, DCR/AA and Thomas Jones, who served as Master of Ceremonies and led the audience in prayer and song.

"Sing a song full of faith

That the dark past has taught us

Sing a song full of the hope

That the present has brought us

Facing the rising sun

Of our new day begun

Let us march until victory is won."

- Lift Every Voice and Sing,
  James Weldon Johnson

Black History Month Poetry

Dear Martin

In dreams of justice, he stood strong and bright
A beacon in the darkest night
Martin spoke of love, of hope, of right
A dream that soared to endless heights.

With every step, his voice rang clear.
A call for unity, loud and near,
From Selma's march to Washington's cheer,
He shed the light on paths we steer.

And still his dream, it lives today
In voices loud, in hearts that sway
Through struggles fierce and skies of gray,
We honor him in every way.

For now, we march with heads held high,
With justice as our guiding sky
Through challenges, we will not shy,
His dreams is ours, and will not die.
In schools of hope and laws of grace,
In every kind and loving face,
In battles won for every race
His legacy we still embrace.

With every step toward equity,
In dreams fulfilled and lives set free,
We build the world he dared to see,
A world of love and unity.
Martin's Dream, a guiding light
Continues through each heartfelt fight,
For justice, love, and human right.
We carry on his vision bright.

By **Greg Anthony Jones,** performed by Sarah Ekenezar, at NJDOT's A Tribute to Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. "Mission Possible: Protecting Freedom, Justice and Democracy in the Spirit of Nonviolence 365," on Thursday, January 30, 2025

Urban Planning Justice

A long journey towards justice.
From our tracks to our paths, black urban planners have eased heavy loads.
I mean heavy loads from society's strong push for inequality.
Environmentally unsafe neighborhoods with everyone else's trash.
The harsh reality of little clout and little cash.
Sidelining by redlining; community trapping with exclusive mapping.
Wings of justice sounding.
This was the blueprint of unfair housing.
Unfair housing with consequences for generations to come.

However, your immense strength is shown.
With determination, you've made your own.
Your own ways, where there were no ways.
Into irreplaceable roadways for us, by us.
These pencils sketch tomorrow's open park, bridge, and expanse.
Connecting communities and giving all residents a fair chance.
Safer routes to school, people-centered urban design.
Justice and reality are now aligned.

Your gift to transportation, a safer aim.
Black urban planners, you really changed the game.
Mobility improved, no longer denied.
Society's -isms, you managed to defy.
I thank you all for breaking down barriers and building bridges instead.
A legacy of progress, for all of us ahead.

By **Sarah Ekenezar**, performed at NJDOT's 37th Annual Black History Month Celebration "Black Urbanism: Shaping Public Policy in Transportation," on Thursday, February 27, 2025

Starting Your Own Pollinator Garden

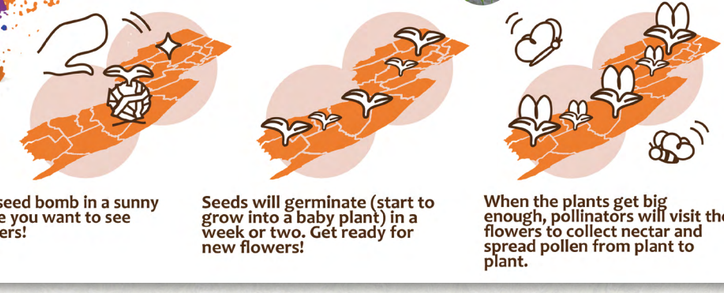
By Jonathan Lahoda

Materials Needed:

How to DIY:

1
Get two scoops of shredded paper and a small scoop of seed mix
2
Form into a firm ball with your hands
3
Mold it in baking cup and let dry
4
Take home, remove from cup and toss in a sunny spot!

What is a pollinator?



Toss your seed bomb in a sunny spot where you want to see more flowers!

Seeds will germinate (start to grow into a baby plant) in a week or two. Get ready for new flowers!

When the plants get big enough, pollinators will visit the flowers to collect nectar and spread pollen from plant to plant.

March 20 marked the official start of spring this year. If you're considering reviving or starting your own at-home garden, the *Transporter* is here to help! In a recent interview, Jonathan Lahoda, Professional Landscape Architect, Section Chief, Region South, NJDOT Office of Landscape Architecture, shared the best tips and tricks to plant, grow and maintain a garden that is not only beautiful but supports New Jersey's native pollinators and wildlife.

What are some supplies you need to start a garden?

You don't need much to start a garden. Besides some garden gloves and a shovel, you will need some quality organic soil, which is available at any home improvement store. If you are planting plants, then [use] some non-colored hardwood mulch, but if you are using seed, use straw to cover the seed.

Where is the best place in your yard to plant a garden?

The best place is somewhere with six to eight hours of sun, either in existing grass or in an existing planting bed. If you decide to plant in existing grass, be sure to remove the grass first before bringing in four to six inches of organic soil. Once the plants are in, only use one to two inches max depth of non-colored hardwood mulch for perennials. You may use four inches of mulch if you plant shrubs or trees.

What are the best native pollinator species to plant?

Some great plants to be included in your garden will be perennials. They are plants that come back yearly and mostly die back in the fall but provide the best habitat and food for critical pollinator species. Keep this in mind as you select your location. Here are some great plants to choose from:

- Flowering Perennials – Purple Coneflower, Milkweed, Goldenrod, Bee Balm, Black-Eyed Susan, Cardinal Flower, Coreopsis, Veronica, Sedum, Catmint
- Ornamental Grasses – Juncus, Muhly Grass, Switchgrass, Carex
- Trees/Shrubs – Redbud, River Birch, Dogwood, Redtwig Dogwood, Buton Bush, Serviceberry
- Seed Mixes- Regional Pollinator Seed Mixes from reputable sites: American Meadows, Stover Seed, Burpee are some examples. Stay away from mixes at big box stores, they tend to have low germination rates and will not produce the desired plantings.

How often should you water your garden while it's establishing?

Once you have made your garden and planted your plants, it is crucial to water it frequently for the first month or so while they establish their roots. If you plant your garden in the spring, be mindful of the rain and only water your plants if the soil feels dry about one inch below the surface. If you plant in the summer, be ready to water at least three to four times a week. Unless your garden is in a wetland, do not soak the plants to see standing water.

How often should you water your garden when it's established?

Once your plants are established, and they start to grow, keep the soil moist but not wet and water about once a week depending on the weather conditions. It is important to not soak the soil but keep it moist, like a dish sponge after you squeeze it out.

Are pollinator gardens maintainable?

Maintaining pollinator gardens is fairly easy. Before the plants reach full size, you will need to weed regularly, check the soil moisture and plant health. Each year, add fresh mulch and always remember you can add or remove plants.

What are the benefits of a pollinator garden?

Growing development and suburbanization of New Jersey means loss of viable habitat for pollinators: birds, bees, bats, and more. A pollinator garden is not only a beautiful, naturalized area, but a habitat that helps to provide food and shelter for so many necessary animals. By adding even a small 10 to 20 square foot garden, you can help to add a refuge and critical stopping point.

Each year you will see the increased benefits: more bees, butterflies, and birds like the goldfinch and hummingbird. If you plant it, they will come. Pollinator gardens are year-round habitats so try not to cut back or trim the plants much in the fall. Wait until mid-spring to cut back. This will allow the over-wintering beneficial insects to wake up and find new shelter.

Any last words of advice or encouragement?

- Seed mixes take time but offer greater variety in plants.
- Always plant in spring once there is no longer a threat of frost.
- Don't worry about using some non-native plants but try and use at least 50 to 75 percent native plants in your garden, if possible. Non-native plants like catmint and butterfly bush do provide nectar to bees and butterflies, but native plants attract more and are more durable in drought.
- Look at the needs of the plants (water needs, size, etc.).
- Don't put lavender next to cardinal flower, or you will risk over watering one plant or underwatering the other.
- Most of all enjoy the process and don't worry about starting small with just five to seven plants. Any garden helps and adds to the growing pollinator garden movement!

The Office of Landscape Architecture has done great work in supporting New Jersey's pollinators, like the endangered Monarch Butterfly. An initiative adopted by New Jersey and other states to plant Milkweed, the only plant the Monarch Butterfly can lay their eggs on and feed on as caterpillars, has already seen spectacular results. This past year, the Monarch Butterfly Count from Mexico's Oyamel Forest, where the species overwinters, has nearly doubled. Although this is great news, meaning we are moving in the right direction, counts are still, historically, very low, and it will take more commitment to support the Monarch off the endangered species list.

For more information, see "The Garden State Continues to Blossom with NJDOT Assistance," pages 1 and 2 of the January 2022 Transporter.

Award Winning Projects and People

By Lizzy Galamba

Professional Engineers Society of Mercer County (PESMC) hosted the 63rd Annual Gene R. O'Brien Awards Banquet on February 22, and three NJDOT engineers received recognition.

Aiden Rodgers, Principal Engineer, and Joey Walsh, Assistant Engineer, in the Office of Maritime Resources, received the PESMC Project of the Year award for their work on the North Wildwood Emergency Beach Nourishment Dredging project. For more information, see "North Wildwood Beach Replenishment Project Completed," page 4 of the October 2024 Transporter.

As the resident engineers for this crucial transportation and social infrastructure project, Rodgers and Walsh oversaw the day-to-day operations and worked directly with local officials, beach and emergency services personnel, contractors and NJDOT leadership to ensure the project was completed on-time and on budget.

"It was an immense challenge, and we enjoyed every bit of it," Rodgers and Walsh said in a joint statement. "The project was considered substantially complete prior to the 4th of July and despite a perpetual stream of design requests and scope edits, our team went from initial project authorization to on-site mobilization in 49 days and full execution in 71."

The project restored approximately one mile of North Wildwood beach, requiring over 750,000 cubic yards of clean sand. Rodgers and Walsh recognize that this work wouldn't have been possible without effective collaboration and cooperation between all parties involved.

"We would like to thank our director, Genevieve Clifton; project engineer, Bill Henderson; inspectors, Ryan Pavlik and Tim Engber; and the design team, which consisted of Gahagan and Bryant and WSP USA," Rodgers and Walsh said.

Rodgers and Walsh were not the only NJDOT employees to receive recognition at the PESMC banquet. Jaime Oplinger, Director of Traffic Engineering, Capital Program Management, received the Government Service Award for her work in championing safety initiatives that focus on bettering safety conditions for vulnerable roadway users, such as the Jersey Extension initiative. For more information, see "Innovative Intersections," page 4 of the January 2025 Transporter.

Whether we're being recognized for our safety initiatives or our emergency response, it is clear that NJDOT is home of award-winning projects and people.

The 2025 PEDE Program Class Graduates

By Lizzy Galamba

Professional Engineering Week ended in celebration at NJDOT. On Friday, February 21, the Professional Engineering and Design Experience (PEDE) Program graduated three professional engineers and recognized a returning graduate who had earned her professional engineering license since graduating last year.

The fourth graduating class of NJDOT's PEDE Program include: Ahmed Khalifa, P.E., Principal Engineer in the Division of Transportation Data and Support, Statewide Planning, Safety and Capital Investment; Jason Spizz, P.E., Senior Engineer in the Division of Operation Support and Engineering, Operations; Sisay Techan, P.E., Project Engineer in Region North Construction and Materials, CPM; and Kadijah Thomas (returning graduate), P.E., Principal Engineer in the Division of Bridge Engineering and Infrastructure Management, CPM.

"New Jersey has a long and proud history of engineering excellence, and one of the greatest examples of that legacy is John A. Roebling, the civil engineer behind the Brooklyn Bridge. Roebling revolutionized bridge design with his pioneering use of steel wire rope – which was manufactured five miles down the road in Trenton. He built some of the most iconic and enduring structures in America. His vision wasn't just about connecting two points on a map – it was about creating something that would serve people for generations," Commissioner O'Connor said at the PEDE graduation ceremony. "Just like Roebling's bridges, your contributions will ripple out across the state, touching every community and every traveler. And as we keep working toward our goal of making New Jersey's roads safer for everyone, your role as engineers will be at the heart of that mission."

Their accomplishments are due, in part, to the guidance and leadership of group leaders and mentors. Group leader Paul Lenarczyck, P.E., Supervising Engineer, CPM oversaw PEDE Group 4, Roadway Maintenance North and Central with mentor Nirav Shah, P.E., Project Management Specialist in the Division of Project Management, CPM, which graduated three of the four recognized graduates: Khalifa, Techan and Thomas. Group leader Sudeh Sadeqlu, P.E., Senior Engineer, CPM oversaw Group 3, Statewide Roadway Design with mentor Ron Denham, P.E., Project Management Specialist in the Division of Project Management, CPM, which graduated Spizz.

Samarth Panhal, P.E., Project Engineer in the Division of Highway and Traffic Design, CPM was also recognized and presented a certificate at the graduation for his participation as a mentor, overseeing Group 2, Statewide Roadway Design. Jess Mendenhall, P.E., Supervising Engineer, CPM; Mohamed Abouakil, P.E., Supervising Engineer, CPM; and Obinna Egbebike, P.E. Senior Engineer in the Division of Roadway Safety were also named in the ceremony as mentors.

PEDE is NJDOT's mentoring program that offers engineering employees, who do not currently have design work responsibilities, the opportunity to gain experience toward the attainment of their own Professional Engineering (P.E.) licenses. To obtain a P.E. license, an Engineer must have four years of engineering experience, two of which must include design experience. This program provides the minimum two years of design experience so engineers are on the right path to earning their P.E. license if they so choose. They do this by working alongside their P.E.-licensed colleagues who serve as mentors.

"The PEDE Program is important because it gives a career development opportunity for our engineering staff. The PEDE Program provides eligible NJDOT engineers design experience to pursue their goal of gaining their engineering license," Alex Didok, PEDE Program Coordinator, said. "To the graduates: thank you and good luck! This may be an understatement, but the Department has invested in you this opportunity of giving you something that, for years, people have asked for. Take what you have learned and make the next step of getting your New Jersey Professional Engineering License."

For mentors, PEDE provides an opportunity to share institutional knowledge with other NJDOT engineering staff who are eager to grow their skillset.

Since the program began in 2019, 19 mentees have graduated from the program after making significant contributions to New Jersey: upgrading guiderail, installing ADA-compliant curb ramps, replacing bridge decks, improving intersections, designing emergency access roadways, upgrading drainage, improving sidewalks, managing traffic, solving illegal dumping issues, replacing control systems – the list goes on.

"The PEDE Program's success is attributed to all who are involved; from our senior leadership, such as the Commissioner who gives support and energy to the program, the mentors who volunteer their time and experiences to help the mentees, and the mentees who sacrifice their spare time to learn what they need to achieve their goal," Didok said. "The PEDE Program is a volunteer program, and its strength comes from the goodwill of its mentors and supporters contributing themselves and their best intensions to make the PEDE Program a success!"

Many people are to be thanked for the true success of the PEDE Program, including Program Coordinator Alex Didok, the group leaders and mentors, as well as Commissioner O'Connor, Assistant Commissioner Kelly Hutchinson, CFO Chuck Maciejunes, Assistant Commissioner Chris Feinthel, Assistant Commissioner Parth Oza and Director of Budget Steve Morley for supporting the program and its participants.

NJDOT's Leading Ladies

By Lizzy Galamba

In NJDOT's nearly 60-year history, three women have served as Commissioner and one as Acting Commissioner.

Affiliation
State
Department
Department of Trans DOT
Started
1981
Retired
1982

NJDOT Commissioner Anne P. Canby

The first woman to lead NJDOT was Anne P. Canby from 1981 to 1982. While serving, Commissioner Canby would often ride her bicycle to work from her home in Pennington. Following her time with NJDOT, Commissioner Canby served in her home state of Delaware as the Secretary of Transportation (1993-2001). She also served as Treasurer of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority and as Deputy Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Just four years after Commissioner Canby left NJDOT, the second woman to be named Commissioner of Transportation was Hazel Frank Gluck. Before she began her career, Commissioner Gluck gained her reputation in New Jersey state service while serving as Executive Director of New Jersey's Lottery Commission (1982) and later as Commissioner of Insurance (1985). After her tenure with the Department of Transportation (1986-1989), Commissioner Gluck was appointed as Commissioner of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. She would later found one of New Jersey's largest lobbying firms: MBI-GluckShaw, after working for Governor Christine Todd Whitman as an advisor.

Affiliation
State
Department
Department of Trans DOT
Started
1986
Retired
1989

NJDOT Commissioner Hazel Frank Gluck

Affiliation
State
Department
Department of Trans DOT
Started
1993
Retired
1994

NJDOT Commissioner Kathy Stanwick

From 1993 to 1994, Kathy Stanwick served as Acting Commissioner of Transportation. Under her leadership, NJDOT opened the final 20.4-mile stretch of I-287. What was once known as the "missing link." Additionally, the Emergency Service Patrol program – a predecessor of the Safety Service Patrol – began in Camden and Morris counties during her service.

The last woman to serve as Commissioner was Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti. Serving from 2018 to 2024, Commissioner Gutierrez-Scaccetti was the longest serving commissioner in NJDOT History. Commissioner Gutierrez-Scaccetti's robust history in the transportation sector guided her success at NJDOT. Beginning her career as assistant contract administrator in the New Jersey Turnpike Authority's law department, Commissioner Gutierrez-Scaccetti worked her way up to Chief of Staff and later Executive Director. After resigning from NJTA, she moved to Florida where she became Executive Director of Florida's Turnpike Enterprise. Under her leadership, NJDOT saw the completion of the I-295/Route 42 Missing Moves project, the first deployment of the Jersey Extension traffic signal technology on Route 129 in Trenton, the start of NJDOT's "QuickFix" program, and the development of Design-Build.

Affiliation
State
Department
Department of Trans DOT
Started
2018
Retired
2024

NJDOT Commissioner Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti

When celebrating the leading ladies that came before us, we would like to acknowledge and thank the women holding leadership positions today: Assistant Commissioner of Administration Kelly Hutchinson; Assistant Commissioner of Local Resources and Community Development Laine Rankin; and the women serving as directors, assistant directors and supervisors.

Female Leaders in Transportation

By Mariah Kondash

1850s

Ida Lewis

Lighthouse keeper attributed to 18 rescues

1870s

Emily Roebling

Unofficial chief engineer of the Brooklyn Bridge construction

1890s

Nellie Bly

Investigative journalist who traveled the world in less than 73 days, a new record

1900s

Anne Bush

First woman to earn a driver's license

1920s

Helen Schultz

First female founder of a bus company

Olive Dennis

Female engineer who advanced the comfortability of trains through her patents

1930s

Jeanette Piccard

First woman to earn a balloon license and enter the stratosphere

Amelia Earhart

First female pilot to make a solo flight across the Atlantic

1940s

WASP

A group of women during WWII who ferried military aircrafts overseas

1960s

Jerrie Mock

First woman to complete a solo trip around the world by plane

Hidden Figures

Three African American women who's mathematic and engineering projects aided American space travel

1970s

Janet Guthrie

First female driver to compete in the NASCAR Cup and Indianapolis 500

1980s

Sally Ride

First American woman to fly in space

Mae Jemison

First African American woman to fly in space

Obituaries

On Sunday, February 2, 2025, Denise Marshall passed away. She was 62 years old.

Denise began her career with the Department of Transportation in March 2005 as a Principal Clerk Typist. Throughout her nearly 20 years of service, she challenged herself and was able to reach the position of Senior Management Assistant in 2023. Those who worked with her appreciated her ability to remain steadfast in any circumstance. She was the face of the Permits Unit, as she was the first person that citizens and vendors would reach, and she frequently received compliments for her exceptional interpersonal and customer service skills.

A dedicated employee, Denise was meticulous in her work. She was prompt, organized, attentive, and seemed to have an answer for everything. When the ePermitting system was introduced, she tested the entire program on her own and then proceeded to teach the rest of the unit how to use it. She was known to regularly seek out additional responsibilities and was considered by many who knew her to be the backbone of her unit. In her quiet moments, she enjoyed listening to music, particularly classical and pop.

She will be deeply missed by her NJDOT colleagues, especially those in the Permits Unit who had the pleasure of working with her for so many years. She will be remembered for her diligence, generosity, and can-do attitude.

Denise is survived by her son, James Talerico.

Since Denise was laid to rest in a private funeral service, her supervisor, Aarti Gupta, and colleague, Meg Frampton, are asking that anyone interested in signing a sympathy card for or making a donation, either in cash or via Zelle, to Denise's Family; please contact aarti.gupta@dot.nj.gov or meg.frampton@dot.nj.gov.

Denise is in the first row, fourth from the left, next to her supervisor, Aarti Gupta.

Denise with her Operations colleagues. She can be found in the front row, fourth from the right, next to Former Assistant Commissioner Andrew Tunnard.

Service Milestones

50 Years of Service

Anthony Genovese

40 Years of Service

Denise Goddard

25 Years of Service

Maryjane Bennett

Anthony Derrico

20 Years of Service

Kelly Hutchinson

Robert Morris

Bernadette Pasqua

James Williams

Lisa Zacchino

Employee Retirements February 2025

24 Years of Service
Swati Gandhi

5 Years of Service
John Lear

Upcoming Events

Mark your calendars!

NJDOT's Division of Civil Rights and Affirmative Action will be hosting a **Women's History Month Celebration** on Monday, March 31 at 12 noon in the Multi-Purpose Room.

NJDOT will be hosting the second **New Employee Insight Breakfast** on Thursday, April 10 at 8 a.m. at NJDOT's Bordentown Training Center.

All new hires (from late January 2025 through April) are invited to attend. Please send your ***RSVP*** to Nicholas.DeJohn@dot.nj.gov.

Take Your Child to Work Day is almost here!

Festivities will take place on Thursday, April 24

If you are interested in volunteering, please email tycyw08@dot.nj.gov.

If you are interested in donating prizes to be awarded throughout the day, please find a location for donation:

- **2nd Floor E&O,** by Lisa Zacchino
- **6th Floor E&O**, by Zina Ellis
- **2nd Floor MOB,** by Danielle DeLorenzo
- **Mount Arlington Headquarters**, by Elizabeth Delgrosso
- **Cherry Hill Headquarters**, by Kathleen Caltagirone

Donations can include toys, puzzles, games, coloring books, crayons, and more!

The Rutgers Center for Advanced Infrastructure and Transportation is currently accepting submissions for the 2025 New Jersey Build a Better Mousetrap (BABM) competition!

This year's categories are Operations or Organizational Improvement. So, if you have found a way to perform your daily tasks more efficiently, created a safer environment or figured out a cost-effective innovative method to achieve the same result, submit your idea today for state and national recognition! Download the entry form here.

Entries are due on Thursday, May 1 and can be submitted via mail or email to:

New Jersey Local Technical Assistance Program – Rutgers CAIT
100 Brett Road
Piscataway, New Jersey 08854

OR

Email Janet Leli: jleli@soe.rutgers.edu

Have questions or need guidance? Contact Janet Leli: **848.445.2906**, and download the 2025 BABM Guidance Book.

Were you recently engaged? Just married? Expecting a new baby or grandbaby?

The Transporter is about celebrating you and all your achievements, both inside and outside of work. If you are experiencing a personal milestone, such as an engagement, marriage or new baby, we want to know about it!

Please email your good news to Elizabeth.Galamba@outlook.com.

Ran a marathon? Participated in volunteer work? Earned a certificate or completed a course? Let us know what you've accomplished outside of work!